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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [ASEC](#) [ML](#)
SUBJECT: DON'T BELIEVE THE HYPE: NO ONGOING MILITARY
OFFENSIVE AGAINST AQIM

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(SBU) Despite recent Reuters and local media reports to the contrary, there are no indications of an ongoing multilateral military offensive against AQIM in northern Mali. On May 5 the Reuters news wire reported that Mali, Algeria, Niger and Mauritania were poised to launch an "imminent" military operation intended to "flush out Al Qaeda militants" from northern Mali. The Reuters report cited an article by the Algerian newspaper El Khabar. A separate report stated that Algeria had delivered five cargo plane loads of military aid to Mali. On May 9 Reuters reported that the Malian military had "launched an operation aimed at flushing out suspected Al Qaeda militants" in northern Mali by sending three combat units to Kidal to track AQIM. Local media in Mali subsequently reprinted, and expanded upon, this report.

2.(U) El Khabar ran a similar story in December 2008, claiming that Mali, Algeria, and Mauritania had launched, with support from Burkina and Senegal, a major military operation against AQIM in northern Mali. The December 2008 report also stated that Algeria had supplied Mali with provisions and that Mali was amassing its forces in the north.

3.(C) The Algerian Defense Attache to Mali told DATT on May 7 that no offensive against AQIM in northern Mali was underway. The Algerian DATT also said Mali does not have the capability to conduct this type of operation. The Algerian Ambassador told our British colleagues in Bamako the same. Algeria did deliver one plane load of supplies - carrying sleeping bags, tents, and flu vaccines - to the Malian military in Bamako. There are no indications, however, of any ongoing military operation in the north to target AQIM. We leave assessments of the capacity of neighboring armed forces to our Embassy colleagues in the region, but where Mali is concerned it is clear that the Malian armed forces do that have the capacity to undertake an offensive or coordinated assault against AQIM. The Ambassador's May 8 conversation with President Amadou Toumani Toure (septel) confirmed this assessment.

4.(C) While the Malian military continues to patrol northern Mali - giving occasional chase to wayward AQIM elements such as the group of four AQIM members captured by Malian army Col. Mbarek ag Akli near Tessalit on April 26 - these patrols are really a continuation of a prior operation focused largely on the remnants of the Tuareg insurgency, which continues to be the Malian military's number one security focus.

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